

Apocrypha

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The modern definition of Apocrypha is writings that are included in the Catholic and Orthodox Old Testaments but are excluded from the Protestant Old Testament, or Jewish texts written after the Tanakh (deSilva, 2020, 2:43). Their validity has been debated since the early centuries of the common era, when some biblical scholars viewed them as texts that should be avoided and that didn't have any value to the church or were even detrimental (Stuckenbruck, 2012, 184). The apocrypha have canonical authority to Catholic and Orthodox Christians, while Protestant Christians do not consider them authoritative, but still sometimes see them as helpful when read with their canonical texts. For example, while Martin Luther saw the Apocrypha as lesser than the canonical texts, he still saw them as valuable to read. On the other hand, the protestant Andreas Bodenstein considered some Apocrypha to be acceptable and some to be bad enough to ban (Stuckenbruck, 2012, 180). In response to this debate by Protestants about the Apocrypha's value, Catholics officially declared them canonical and condemned anyone who didn't recognize them as such (Stuckenbruck, 2012, 180). Since then, many Catholic scholars have called the Apocrypha "deuterocanonical" since their authenticity was officially accepted later than that of the main body of the Hebrew Bible (Stuckenbruck, 2012, 181). Orthodox churches usually accept the Apocrypha and sometimes further texts as canonical (deSilva, 2020, 43).

These Christian-centered definitions are not the only ones, though. "Apocrypha" is also sometimes defined as texts that are included in the Septuigint but not the Masoretic Text (Stuckenbruck, 2012, 183). However, the Septuigint and other Greek writings sometimes don't include all of the Apocrypha and sometimes include texts beyond what is included in the Apocrypha, so this definition is not universal (Stuckenbruck, 2012, 184). Based on the label "Apocrypha," which roughly means "hidden" in Greek (deSilva, 2020, 2:43), one might think that the Apocrypha are texts that were meant to be hidden. Texts that mention being hidden include Daniel and 4 Ezra. However, most of the Apocrypha do not mention being hidden (deSilva, 2020, 2:44), and the status of those that do is not always clear (Daniel only has apocryphal sections, and 4 Ezra is both apocrypha and pseudepigrapha) (Stuckenbruck, 2012, 187). The Apocrypha as a whole are very diverse

texts. Their genres include additions to already existing Biblical chapters, historical writings, literary stories, prayer, wisdom literature, and apocalyptic text (Stuckenbruck, 2012, 188). Some were composed in Hebrew or Arameic while others were originally Greek, and their dates of composition range over 500 years from the 400s bce to the 100s ce (Stuckenbruck, 2012, 189).

But why should we care about the Apocrypha? For one, they were mostly written during Second Temple Judaism, (deSilva, 2020, 2:43) so we can learn about the religious ideas of the time by reading the Apocrypha. Josephus used some Apocrypha as sources for his own writing (deSilva, 2020, 2:44), highlighting the value they had to scholars at the time, and we can tell by their inclusion in the Dead Sea Scrolls (deSilva, 2020, 2:44) that they were widely read along with being highly valued. We can also tell that Jesus was influenced by some of the ideas from the Apocrypha, specifically the Wisdom of Ben Sira (deSilva, 2020, 2:44), and by better understanding the origins of Jesus' teachings, we can better understand the Gospels. This diverse, complex set of texts can aid us in our understanding of Second Temple Judaism and the Gospels.

Works Cited

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- Stuckenbruck, Loren T. "Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha." In *Early Judaism: A Comprehensive Overview*, edited by John J. Collins and Daniel C. Harlow, 180-203. Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2012.